

Keeping the manufacturing industry competitive



Views from Senate

by Olympia Snowe

U.S. Senator, R-ME

At a time when our economy is struggling, it is vital that Congress assist manufacturers to enhance our nation's defense supply chain, create additional jobs, and remain globally competitive. As one of the most successful Federal-State partnerships in government, the Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) provides critical services to our nation's manufacturers, enabling them to improve productivity and better compete in the global marketplace.

This past week, I partnered with Senator Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, to request \$20 million in MEP funds to help small- and medium-sized American manufacturers modernize to compete in the demanding global marketplace. We were joined by sixteen Senators in this call for the additional funds to be included in the forthcoming Fiscal Year 2008 supplemental appropriations bill.

The \$20 million funding request would be provided to MEP centers nationwide to offset fees that manufacturers

pay for MEP services. The offsets would be limited to manufacturers with fewer than 100 employees, often the first to feel the impact of an economic downturn, and would establish quicker and greater infrastructure improvements among small manufacturers. The result of this investment would include innovation, job creation and retention, sales increases, and cost savings.

As members of the Senate Task Force on Manufacturing, Senator Levin and I strongly believe that American companies can compete with any company in the world if they have a level playing field. The problem is that our manufacturing companies often are not competing against foreign companies, but foreign governments. We need to find ways to support our manufacturers, and the Manufacturing Extension Partnership is one of the few federal programs that provide tangible assistance to American manufacturers across the nation to help them retain and create jobs. MEP projects helped to create or retain more than 52,000 manufacturing jobs in

2007 alone.

MEP is the only nationwide program created specifically to help the 341,000 small manufacturers who serve as the backbone of our nation's economy. MEP Centers assist their customers to become innovative high-tech global competitors, to increase domestic manufacturers' contributions to national defense and homeland security, and to keep the economy strong, with thousands of high-wage manufacturing jobs. The program assists America's small manufacturers and helps boost productivity, sales and investment in modernization and employment.

The prosperity of our nation was built with the help of the manufacturing industry. Now that we've transitioned into a global economy, we have a responsibility to provide these workers and this industry with the tools and resources they need to successfully compete in today's world. The MEP is a vital tool to moving forward and can be a key resource that helps put us on the road to economic recovery.

